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Press Release

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Canyon County Man Dies from West Nile Virus Infection

A Canyon County man in his 70s died from an illness associated with West Nile virus. This is the first West Nile related death from Canyon County, and the sixth Idaho resident to die from a disease associated with the virus in 2006.

“We offer our sympathies to his family,” says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, deputy state epidemiologist. “We continue to see widespread infections across southern and eastern Idaho and urge people to ‘Fight the Bite’ of mosquitoes to protect themselves.” A total of 440 Idaho residents have been reported with West Nile infections this year, with 77 of those suffering from neuroinvasive infections that usually require hospitalization.

Weather permitting, the Canyon County Abatement District plans to aerial spray many areas of the county tonight. Ada County took similar action against mosquitoes last week. Tengelsen says even with spraying, people still need to take precautions. “People should not let their guard down because of the aerial spraying,” she says. “Any abatement activity is not going to kill 100 percent of the mosquitoes, people still need to be careful and take personal responsibility to avoid mosquito bites.”

For personal protection, she advises people to:

- Insect-proof their homes by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on their property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;

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- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk; and
- Report dead birds and squirrels to your local Fish and Game office.

West Nile virus does not appear to affect most animals including dogs and cats, but can cause severe illness in horses and certain species of birds. Although there is not a vaccine available for people, there are several vaccines for horses. Over one-third of horses which contract West Nile virus may die, so horse owners are encouraged to vaccinate their animals. Horse owners who suspect West Nile viral infection in their animal should contact their veterinarian immediately.

Additional information about the virus is available from the Department of Health and Welfare's web site at <http://www.westnile.idaho.gov> is updated regularly. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Urban Pest Management program also has information available on steps to prevent home-grown mosquito infestations. This information is available on ISDA's web site at <http://www.idahoag.us>.

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(Editors: For more information, please contact Tom Shanahan at 334-0668, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)